The Princess and the Whipping Girl: Chapter II
By Yu May

Everyone in Ardor knew Winchester. He'd always been there, the one staple of the little castle town. Legend had it he'd even met King Meynard I as a boy, and after successfully living through the successive reigns of Meynard II and Meynard III, there were long-standing bets about whether Winchester might outlive Meynard IV.

Of course, none of these bets were mentioned in Winchester's presence, nor in polite society. But in the Ardor Castellum's red light district, those old gambler's agreements were still honored. Even in a little kingdom like Ardor, there was enough demand to support "the world's oldest profession," and a selection of other vices. Ardor's proximity to the English Channel made it a popular spot for English and French sailors hoping to waste a few month's wages in a few nights of debauchery.

A good church elder like Winchester, of course, would never stoop to being a customer of such establishments…officially. But a man who advised the king had to keep abreast of everything that went on within the city walls, and also without. He may have been devout, but when it came to buying information, Winchester wasn't needlessly scrupulous about the seller.

Ardor had been enjoying 5 years of peace and growth, but the memories of the old war still lingered, a few tired old magicians and crackpot potion sellers still plied their trade, and not all of the old Masters of Sorcery had been caught and burned.

On this occasion, Winchester thankfully didn't have to visit a brothel looking for answers. Pulling up his collar to avoid eye contact with any ladies of the night, he rode his horse, a trusty old yellow mare named Proverbia, straight to The Saucy Siren. A misnomer, in Winchester's opinion, given that it served only drink.

After hitching up Proverbia and ducking in, Winchester found it drab and dusty as ever, except for the amateur-painted mural of Odysseus tied to a mast, enraptured by the song of some rather buxom sirens.

Beneath the mural, a portly, middle-aged man was snoozing on the floor, drool dripping down his mustache. Behind the counter, Winchester could make out the top of a boy's cap, seemingly moving of its own accord. Of course, the cap was attached to a child, too short to be seen. A little, grease-stained hand appeared above the counter, waving furiously. "No drinks! Barrel's empty! We're closed for the night, sir!"

Winchester leaned over the counter, to find the owner of the cap, dutifully sitting on a ratty canvas-covered pillow, and counting out coins to make notes in a ledger. “Hello, Emile.”

At the sound of the name, the owner of the cap started, shoulders tense. Winchester distinctly caught the flash of a few coins scattering as they were dropped.

“Emile,” who was the proud owner of the boy’s cap, and the proud owner of the boy’s name, turned out to be a girl. Her burnt umber brown hair was certainly boyish, barely shoulder-length and cut crookedly, probably by the drunken sleeper. But her pretty face and grimy skirt and apron gave her away. “Elder Winchester? It’s not St. Valentine’s Day, and even if it were, you’d have missed the rest of the church and the gift-giving. They don’t like to stick around this quarter past dusk.”

“I’m not here to give alms to the poor. I’m here with a job offer.”

Emile’s head snapped up at this piece of news, before she remembered to duck down her head to her work again. Winchester observed that since the counter was too tall, she was using the flask shelf as a makeshift workbench. “Well, if that’s not just a clever name for a sermon, feel free to wake up the Master of the House and tell him.”

“Not for that old fool. The job offer is for you, specifically, Emile.”

Emile huffed. “Want to rescue me from this den of sin? Send me to the orphanage so the Sisters can bend me over and whack me until they save my soul? Or have me cleaning chamber pots at the castle? Well, I make more money here.”

Winchester raised an eyebrow, the folds of his skin reaching up to his bald skull. “Do you? Strange, last time I was here, I distinctly recall that old skin-flint,” Winchester gestured to the fat, snoring man, “boasting to anyone who would listen about how generous he was to offer room and board for his orphan niece, even if it bankrupted him. Doesn’t exactly strike me as the type of man who pays his workers their wages before the sun sets.”

Emile froze, then put the book away, brushing off her apron as she stood up to look the old man in the eye. Nudging away the grimy pillow with her foot, she put her hands in her pockets, before pulling them out again and crossing her arms. “All right, what goes on? This better be more than maid work.”

Now that Winchester had Emile's attention, he decided he had no more time to waste. "The castle needs a new…handmaiden for Princess Isadora. The position offers 20 crowns a month, along with room and board."

Emile smiled wickedly. "20 crowns? Who do you expect me to sleep with? The King or the Queen? It'll cost you 30 crowns if you expect me to do both!"

Winchester choked a bit before he caught the irony in her voice. "N-no! For shame! You'd be educated by private tutors, and there would be light house cleaning work. Your duties would be to accompany the Princess throughout her day, act as her playmate, classmate, dress her in the mornings, and–"

Emile pantomimed lifting her skirt and bending over. "And undress myself, so I can take her beatings for her. You want a whipping girl, don't you? Well, seems you want me bending over for someone after all! Why hide it? Everyone heard about the last one when she went off to the mad house."

Winchester flushed again. "I wasn't going to hide anything…You interrupted me before I had a chance to explain all the duties. But, yes, you'd be a whipping girl. That's why it offers 20 crowns."

"30 crowns."

"That's ridiculous! That's more than a castle guard makes! You'd be…interested in the position, then?" Winchester was about to go on a tangent on the topic of supply and demand when he caught himself.

Emile held a hand to her chin in mock puzzlement. "Would I? Can't say I fancy having my fanny flogged every day for less than a crown."

"Really? How much do you get paid when your Uncle spanks you? That's what the pillow was for, wasn't it?"

Finally, it was Emile's turn to blush. Bowing her head, she nudged the pillow again, trying to hide it further under the counter, before losing patience and sending it skidding across the floor with a deft kick. "I don't…That's none of your business! Anyway, I can scrounge up more than 20 crowns in a fortnight, easy."

Winchester pressed his advantage. "Scrounge up? How so? Tips? A few dropped hay pennies here and there? I hope you're not out with the whores at your age. Do I need to

have your uncle clapped in irons?"

Emile's face turned beet red, before she remembered she was supposed to be haggling. "No! I…Look, nothing like that. You don't have to patronize me. I have plenty of opportunities here. And so what if I get popped from time to time? Happens to every kid. At least I have the dignity of knowing I'm not paying the penalty for someone else's crime."

"Really? A pinnacle of fair-mindedness and even-handedness, your Uncle? Never laid a hand on you, unless you deserved it, I warrant?"

Emile reflexively shot a nervous glance at the sleeping man, and almost put her hands to her bottom. But when she remembered Winchester, she instead held her clenched fists tight to her sides. "Don't act so high and mighty. You're the one trying to pay me to take a spanking for that brat of a Princess. And everyone knows that King Meynard is spank-happy. Ever hear the old joke about King Meynard's Rule of Thumb?"

Winchester most certainly had heard that old joke, and several variations on it. The cleanest versions always involved someone getting beaten with a stick. "I have. Look, I'm not proud that the monarchy still feels the need to hold onto this old position. All I'm saying is if you're going to get whomped on anyway, you might as well get paid good money to do it. If you can manage to 'scrounge away' more than 20 crowns a month, then I'd hate to take you away from your only family. I'm sorry for wasting your time."

As Winchester turned to leave, he felt a tug at his sleeve as Emile almost scrambled over the counter to reach him. "Wait! Don't go!"

Her Uncle snorted at the sound, then rolled in his sleep. His face smacked against the pillow that Emile had kicked across the floor. He licked his lips happily, broke wind, then rested his head against it and resumed snoring.

Winchester felt Emile's hands shaking as she clutched him, and her voice trembled. "You're not taking me away from family. And stop calling him my uncle. He was the husband of my father's sister, before she died. You're just…asking a lot for 20 crowns, that's all. Would you be a whipping boy for that much?"

"I was a whipping boy for much less. And anyway, you'll have the opportunity to be close to royalty. That's something an intelligent person can make much use of…without having to steal a single cent."

The wicked gleam finally returned to Emile's eyes. "Steal? I'd never steal from our beloved monarch! I'm a crown loyalist!"

"You'd better not, or you'll have much worse than a spanking to worry about. The position is yours as soon as I wake up your not-uncle and get his permission to bring you to the castle. But first you're going to turn out your pockets and hand me every coin you've 'scrounged' away."

Emile's eyes were still bright, but her face went straight from looking like a criminal mastermind to looking like a convicted felon. "But…why? It's mine! I earned it!"

"Did you? Think carefully about your next answer. I need a trustworthy girl for this position. Think of this as your background check. Let's say I were to have a look at that financial record you keep? I suppose I wouldn't find a penny unaccounted for?"

Emile released her grip on Winchester's shoulder, and slid back behind the counter. She put on a brave face, but she looked deflated. "Take the book! You won't find anything out of place. I'm the only one here with a head for numbers."

"And what do you have to say? Have you been stealing from the skin-flint?"

Emile rolled her eyes as she put her hands on her hips. "No!"

Winchester turned to leave again. Behind him, he heard a panicked squeak and the clatter of mugs as she scuffled after him. "No! I mean, yes! Just a few pennies, here and there! I mean, he doesn't pay me, right? You can't blame me for that! How else am I–"

As Emile caught up to him, Winchester looked her in the eye. "How else are you ever supposed to get out of here?"

As Emile looked around the tavern, Winchester saw the place through her eyes for the first time: it was a stinking prison. When she looked back at him, there was no more pretense. He was about to close the prison door, and they both knew it. "Please! I'm sorry!"

"Turn out your pockets. I won't have an unrepentant thief working under my direction. But a reformed thief is a different matter."

Unable to hide her relief, Emile reached a hand into her pocket and produced a small purse. "I didn't steal most of this. Some of it really is tips and dropped pennies…"

Winchester opened it to find it stuffed to the brim with hay pennies, pennies, even a shilling or two. It was easily 2 crowns worth of loose change. “Don’t suppose you kept a record of that?”

At one look from Winchester, Emile continued to confess the truth. “As a matter of fact, I did. He never checks, but I wrote little notes in chicken scratch, right next to where I count out change. I’ve earned a total of 18 crowns, 2 shillings, and 9 and ½ pence legit. Another 3 crowns, 4 shillings, 11 pence on the side. Rest is hidden in my mattress. Of course, he’d take it all regardless and say it’s for me room and board.”

“Go and fetch it. And pack any necessaries while you’re up there. I don’t expect this will take long.”

“You’re not going to make me hand over my life’s savings, are you?”

Winchester didn’t look up as he rifled through the coins and did a quick sum in his head. “I won’t confiscate so much as a ha'penny that you earned. But if you take so much as a ha'penny you *didn’t* earn out of this place, I’m tanning your hide and bringing you straight back to your uncle. That’s…1 crown, 2 and ½ pence you still owe, in addition to this.”

As Emile darted up the stairs, Winchester held up a finger to catch her attention. “Oh, and Emile, just so you’re aware…As a whipping girl, it’s your duty to accept any spanking on behalf of Princess Isadora when she misbehaves. But you can also expect a spanking for any minor offense on your part. Forgetfulness, untidiness, that sort of thing. Stealing isn’t a minor offense.”

Emile nodded excitedly, then ducked upstairs, before poking her head down to add, “Yes, sir!”

Winchester turned his attention to Emile’s not-uncle just as he was starting to half-awaken to grumble about the noise.

“Erhmile? Izzat yoo? If’n yoo can’t stay quiet, I’ll thrash ya til you cry, and then you can stay quiet if you don’t want me to start over again.”

“Charming,” thought Winchester, as he poured a drink and prepared to introduce himself. It was time to start some real haggling.

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Emile stepped over her not-uncle's third or fourth wife to reach her mattress, fetched her life's savings, and threw all her worldly goods into a single bag. Apart from a few ratty outfits, she had a children's Bible with engraved pictures, given to her by her father, and a rope necklace with a miniature portrait of her mother.

She had just enough time to count out the ill-gotten gains from her career in embezzlement, before her mad rush of excitement started to fade. How was that old geezer going to convince the skin-flint to let her go any way? Surely, there would be demands for years worth of food and board? What if Winchester had to dip into her life savings to haggle for her?

The threat of the spanking loomed large in her mind as well. Sure, she got slapped around all the time here, but coming from Winchester it somehow felt completely different than coming from the skin-flint. Emile suddenly realized that she was so used to getting hit for doing nothing, the idea of getting spanked for doing something wrong felt like a strange, new experience.

Or, rather, a strange, *old* experience. Because that had been the way her parents had done it. They only spanked when she did something wrong. It was comforting, to finally know what the rules were.

Until Emile remembered that her whole job was now, specifically, to also get spanked for things someone else did wrong, which took a bit of the shine off the intense feeling of relief.

"Que sera, sera," Emile told herself.

Just as she darted down the stairs to hand Winchester the stolen funds, she found him finishing his haggling. "Oh, but I insist! 2 crowns is but a trifle! After all, you've been so good to this poor orphan over the years. And she, not even a blood relative! You say this wine is from before the Overthrow of the Sorcerer? Damned fine year, for wine if nothing else. If you'd be so good as to sign here…and here. I'd hate to waste any more of your time."

"An' I can expect her support, a'course? Maybe I 'kin visit her at the castle? Bring some ale for the King to try?"

Winchester poked Not-Uncle in the belly with a knowing look as he slapped his own behind. “I’m sure she’ll show you all the gratitude you are owed! Ah, but don’t tell me you want to be a whipping boy, yourself, now!”

Not-Uncle guffawed at that, and signed his name twice without reading too carefully.

As quick and careful as a fox, Winchester scooped up the change Emily held in her hands, so that he didn’t miss a beat as he counted out a second pile of coins.

“Oh! And here’s…1 crown, 4 shilling, 11 pence. For the wine, and also a little extra tip for a pillar of our community!”

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As Emile gingerly sat side saddle on top of Proverbia, Winchester led the mare by the reins. The morning doves were starting to sing. She almost wished the sun were up so she could see the castle already. “How did you do that?”

Winchester hid a smile as he rapped on the first gate to alert the night guard. “Oh, a good haggler won’t reveal all his secrets. We can’t hire an orphan, and he’s still technically your legal guardian, but let’s just say he won’t have much of a leg to stand on contractually if he ever makes a stink about your employment. If I buy a few bottles of wine from him a year, we probably won’t even have to worry about it coming to that. Your wages will be held in escrow til you come of age, so he can’t touch them. You are free to stay with us as long as you like. If you choose to leave before you come of age, he remains your legal guardian–”

“No. I don’t care if I get spanked 10 times a day, every day.”

Winchester chuckled. “Hopefully, it won’t come to that. Princess Isadora’s whipping girls all earn their pay, but there’s only so much time in the day for her to get into mischief. I was going to say, after you come of age, you are completely free, to stay or to go. I don’t envy your job. Just know you aren’t trapped here.”

Emile subtly pinched her arm to make sure she wasn’t dreaming. Sure enough, she was awake, and the smarting sensation from the pinch let her finally exhale. She felt like she had been holding her breath for hours. “Why did you pick me for this job? Was I just so bratty to you when the church visited on Valentines Day, you figured I deserved a job where I get spanked?”

“Oh, no. Quite the opposite. I found your disinterest in accepting our charity quite refreshing, actually. And I’d never hire a brat for this position.”

“Then why? That can’t have been the only reason.”

Impressed, Winchester hummed to himself. “Well, Ardor Castellum is only home to about 4,000 people. I make it my business to know what goes on within a stone’s throw of the palace. When a child is orphaned here, people talk.”

“You knew my parents?”

“Not intimately. I was briefly acquainted with them during the war. I had them consult with the palace guards about magical defenses during the Troubles with the Mages. Your mother must have been pregnant with you when they first visited, come to think of it. It was a blow when we lost two of our local magicians…”

“Did they talk about me?”

“Oh, in the way I suppose all young parents talk about their children. I inquired after you at the orphanage and was told you’d been adopted by your uncle. Imagine my surprise when–”

“When you and the church ladies went slumming on Valentine’s Day with your gifts to the poor, only to have me pop up and start throwing your little presents back at you? How did you recognize me if we hadn’t met?”

“I didn’t. But a girl with the name ‘Emile’ sticks in the memory. After our little…dialogue on Valentine’s Day, I inquired at the orphanage again, more insistently.”

“So, this is charity? You think you’re doing me a favor, whisking me off to a Princess’ castle?”

“Charity is a virtue, and you shouldn’t be hesitant to accept it when it’s offered. But if it makes you feel any better, a whipping girl can’t be just any urchin off the street. The orphanage used to train children especially for palace work before Parliament shut that little tradition down. The ideal candidate has to have had some education at least, and preferably some brains of her own.”

“My! All that to just bend over and take a spanking? I’ll have to be smart at both ends!”

Winchester didn't want to encourage Emile's coarse humor, so he only let out a polite sniff in lieu of a laugh. "Precisely. But do recall you're not a court jester."

"...Say, old man, how many times do you think I'm gonna get spanked, anyway? Just counting the times the Princess gets me in trouble?"

Winchester considered the question. "I won't lie to you. You can probably expect several spankings a week, on average. A lot of the servants don't care for the tradition, but King Meynard is a firm believer in the whipping boy tradition, and when he remembers he has one, he likes to know they're earning their keep. Any of the higher ranking servants will have both the right, and the obligation to whip you in place of Princess Isadora. They'll carry out their duties as expected of them…

"Others might like the idea of taking out some of their own frustrations with Princess Isadora on a helpless bottom, only to have yours helpfully present itself, so you'll have to have your wits about you. Avoid making enemies…

"Also, schoolmaster Tutel is a firm believer in the rod of chastisement. He's a tough old bird, but fair...generally speaking. If anyone tells you it's time for a spanking, accept it with dignity, even if you think you don't deserve it."

"Well, yeah. That's the job, ain't it?"

"It is. But if you suspect any servants are…over-eager to bend you over their knee, you can speak to me afterwards. I can't rescue you from every spanking, but just because it's your job to be spanked on behalf of Princess Isadora doesn't mean you can be spanked on a whim. You answer to Princess Isadora, and answer *for* her when she's earned a spanking, but you are also her companion and guest. In a certain sense, you outrank many of the servants who will be bending you over. But as Chief Butler, you are under my authority, and therefore my responsibility. Ah! Thank you, Guard!"

As they were ushered in, Emile caught the morning light touching the castle, just as she hoped. She didn't mind that she only had time for a short nap before her first day on the job. "Will you spank me, then?"

Winchester seemed taken aback. He lifted Emille off the saddle and led Proverbia into her stable. "Well, ordinarily, I spank the new whipping girls on their first day, in order to fully warn them of the job they're undertaking, before they commit. Since we were in such a rush today, that doesn't really apply."

Without needing to be asked, Emile helped Winchester unsaddle Proverbia, one of many unpaid tasks she'd been forced to learn over the years. "Yeah, you don't have to teach me what a spanking feels like. My butt's thoroughly acquainted with the concept. But let's say Princess Isadora throws a tantrum the second we walk in. Will you haul me over your knee then and there?"

"Unlikely. I rank so highly, I won't have to spank you unless it's for something you actually did wrong. So hopefully never. One of the blessings of my office is I don't have to participate in this whipping boy nonsense. And I certainly don't want to hear of you doing anything so serious that it lands you in my study."

Emile bowed her head. "Me neither. You know, at first, I assumed that reporting to you meant I was reporting to you…for that part of the job too. So, when should I report for my first spanking?"

Winchester seemed to brush off the question as he recognized some of the servants up at the crack of dawn for their morning duties. "Well, this whole business has kept us both up all night. Look over there! The servant boys are up already. I'll send one of them to wake you at 8 o'clock in the morning. That will give you at least an hour or two of sleep. You'll have a rough first day, but you can turn in early tomorrow night. I suppose Princess Isadora could wake up on the wrong side of the bed and get you spanked before breakfast, but you won't have to worry about that until it happens. Your first day is for orientation, so you won't be expected to report to Princess Isadora until *tomorrow* morning."

"No, I meant when do I get spanked for stealing? You said that wasn't a minor offense."

This stopped Winchester in his tracks. "Ah! Well, given you weren't in our employ when that occurred, I wasn't planning to punish you for that."

Emile shot a sly grin as she shrugged melodramatically. "Really? All this talk of my duties as a whipping girl, and I don't get spanked for stealing?"

Winchester kneeled down to look Emile in the eye. "Surely you don't want me to spank you?"

With that, Emile found herself at a crossroads. She knew she couldn't brush this off with a joke. "To be honest. I was kinda' expecting it. I'm going to get spanked eventually, anyway, right? I know it's strange, but, it's somehow less…painful to get spanked when you know you did something wrong."

“As opposed to getting spanked when you know you did nothing wrong?”

Emile gripped her left arm, avoiding Winchester’s gaze. “Yeah.”

“I see. Well, if you’re feeling guilty about the stealing, I can spank you for that. But it’s going to be a proper one. Last chance to back out.”

Emile only needed a few seconds before she was able to look the old man in the eye. “It’s what my parents would have done if they caught me stealing. So, yes, sir, I think I need it. Seems like a more fitting welcome than…whatever the Princess has in store for me.”

“Very well. I suppose that means you’d also like it over and done with now? You don’t even want one hour of sleep tonight?”

Emile snorted. As if she could get to sleep when she was this excited. She started to roll her eyes before a disapproving look from Winchester paused her mid-eye-roll. “Don’t you think a spanking will help me stay awake much better than a few minutes of sleep? Send me to bed and no promise I’ll be up when you need me.”

Winchester sighed and produced a pocket watch. Emile saw the hands indicating it was a quarter past 5 o’clock in the morning. Winchester considered the time, before nodding and putting away the watch. “Well, that settles it. I can’t say I’ve ever heard someone make a more persuasive case *in favor of* getting a spanking…Anyway, I suppose I shouldn’t skip the traditional introduction. But after that, it’s straight to breakfast, and woe betide you if I catch you napping. Hopefully, if Princess Isadora can behave herself past breakfast, and if King Meynard isn’t eager to give the new whipping girl a ‘royal welcome,’ we can have your orientation finished by lunch. To my study we go!”

To her own surprise, Emile offered Winchester her hand, and he took it. Knowing a spanking was imminent, she didn’t feel like talking now, and Winchester seemed to share her awkwardness. As they approached a thick wooden door, carved with whimsical scenes of bare-bottomed monks and nuns, Emile couldn’t contain a giggle.

Winchester followed her gaze, and smiled when he realized what she was looking at. He’d seen the same carvings thousands of times, but now he saw them with fresh eyes. “Those are from the poem, ‘The Comedy of the Burglar.’ The Kingdom of Ardor’s claim to fame. Do you know it?”

“The one with the Monk who sneaks into the cellar to drink, and thinks he hears a burglar crawling around?”

“Yes! Then he spanks the ‘burglar,’ only…”

“Only it’s the Abbess! Who snuck in to meet her lover in secret. Then she thinks the burglar must have spanked her? Ha! Mom and Dad used to read it to me from a picture book! But I don’t remember the monk getting spanked!”

“The book didn’t include that part? Outrageous! Next, the Monk was supposed to return and investigate, only to find the Abbess’ lover still hiding from ‘the burglar.’ So, of course–”

Emile started cracking up, “Each of them thinks the other is the burglar!”

“Right! Then as both of them are running around hiding from each other, they each, in turn, run into a pretty young woman in a nun’s habit wandering the cellars, who claims she’s hiding from the burglar…”

“Wait, is that the carving of the nun hiding the silverware with the two men kissing her cheek on either side?”

“Yes! You’ve guessed by now haven’t you?”

“She’s the burglar?!?”

“Yes, and then, the Abbess gathers all the nuns to seek out and flog the ‘burglar’ only to find…well, it goes on and on. I expect you’d much rather read it for yourself.”

“Aw! At least tell me how the monk gets flogged!”

They both were in fits of giggles, and the exhaustion of staying up all night only made the laughter more intoxicating. Emile felt like the stumbling, drunk monk in the wood carving.

As she caught her breath, Emile was finally able to say the words she’d been thinking and unable to force out. “Thank you for this opportunity, sir. I won’t let you down.”

“You’re welcome. I don’t believe you will.”

“...And thank you for spanking me.”

“No need for that. You can decide after we’re done if you still feel like thanking me.”

With that, Winchester turned the handle of the door, and ushered her into his study.

For the first time since her parents had passed away, Emile felt like there was something other than pain in her future. And for the first time since being sent to live with her “not-uncle,” Emile thought that a spanking wasn’t just something she had to endure.

A spanking was something she could overcome.

A spanking was nothing.

End of Chapter II